

# The Clipper Visits William Nash

BY NANCY McCAFFERTY

It is only fitting that William Nash lives in the home Ebenezer Wormald built in 1736. He has a fine appreciation and lively interest in Duxbury's history. He knows what he's talking about. You see, Mr. Nash is 90 years old, although you'd never suspect it from his firm lean frame or his perceptive conversation. He is a witness to yesterday and it was a pleasure to walk the pages of the past with him.



William Nash

Nash's introduction to Duxbury began prior to World War I. His father rented a summer home from Percy Walker and the young Nash raced his boat on the local waters. "I never won anything but it was a great pleasure to race," said Nash.

Brought up in Boston, he attended Boston Latin before transferring to the Volkmann School for the last 2 years of high school. His next stop was Harvard and he graduated in 1913. "In those days, there were no majors. You took the courses you wanted after completing the basics but you weren't required to specialize in one particular area. It was an effective program," Nash favored history and math.

After graduation, he had a brief encounter with the wool business before World War I interrupted his civilian career. In 1916, he joined the Navy and was sent to the naval training station at Newport, R.I., where he served as a seaman until 1917. He continued his military obligation at the officers' training school at Harvard and later entered the ranks of the young

men in Washington, whose job it was to plan and train for the most effective use of a fast flexible boat produced by Henry Ford, a forerunner to PT boats of World War II. "It was a maneuverable boat, supposedly effective on the attack," said Nash. He was in Washington when the war ended. "Bedlam broke loose, church bells rang all over the city. Boston held an impressive parade. It was a celebration which lasted well into the evening. I haven't seen anything like it since. With the Korean and Vietnam wars, people's ideas about war had changed. There were no celebrations."

Bill Nash returned to the wool business and recalls the interview which answered his question about salary. "It's the opportunity you're getting" he was told. The salary was \$8 a week which Nash said was "all right because \$8 went a lot further than it does now." He remained a wool dealer and was active in the manufacturing end of the business until 1929.

Then people's lives turned upside down. The stock market crashed, an infamous Friday blackened calendars across the country, and Nash was caught in the middle of the panic. "Those who lived through it know what a real financial crisis is. Stores closed, people paid in IOU's, banks shut their doors. Nothing like it has happened since. Before it hit -- a matter of days -- people talked about the prosperity going on forever. President Hoover inherited a shaky financial situation when he took office and 2 or 3 prominent bankers in the country sent out warnings but no one paid attention. I remember seeing people lined up to withdraw their savings from the Boston 5c Savings Bank. The line stretched from School St. and around the corner of Washington St. I don't know how, but the bank paid all those people their money. Today there is a much stronger banking system -- these recessions are nothing compared to the Depression. In 1929 there was mass movement to get rid of your stocks and bonds." Franklin Roosevelt was precise in his statement, 'The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.' There was real fear then. To cite an example of the turbulent and unethical practices leading to the Depression, Nash told of the Florida land boom of 1927. Acres of land were sold intended for use as house lots. People didn't go to see what they bought and later were shocked to learn that much of the Florida they purchased was swamp land.

Recovery was slow. Nash "did the best I could to get any kind of a job I could." By 1935, he had secured an administrative post at New England Deaconess Hospital and in 1945, became Bursar for Milton Academy. Nash's job was to assist the treasurer in preparing the budget, controlling expenses and seeing to the upkeep, building, and repair of the property.

Milton Academy was founded in 1798 as an independent prep school dedicated to high academic standards. "The unique aspect of the school is that in 1901 it was not co-educational. The lower school consisted of day students, both boys and girls, but the upper schools were separate, composed of day pupils and boarders. There was no sharing of faculty except in the areas of drama, music and the lab classes such as chemistry. There were 3 principals, one for each school, who reported to a headmaster. Today the academy has become extensively co-ed while still respecting some distinctions between the boys and girls schools. Nash declined to comment on the tuition except to say that it has "gone up terribly" since his retirement in 1962.

While at Milton, Nash received a call from an old connection, Percy Walker, about the Wormald house in Duxbury. It had been deserted for some years and had badly deteriorated. Walker commented about the "clam neck" chimney (falling down) and was honestly hesitant about recommending the house. However, the year was 1946, lumber was still under World War II rations, and hardly a new house was available.

Nash and his wife, Marion, were delighted with the idea of restoring the old house to its original and considerable charm. For the next 15 years they spent holidays and weekends healing the wounds time and misuse had inflicted. "I would have to warn people about old houses," said Nash. "One has to be young to take the challenge of restoration. It is a tremendous amount of work. I enjoyed the idea of fixing up an old house but I don't think I'd ever do it again. I wonder how I did it then!"

The original house consisted of what is now the living room, a tiny side room near the fireplace, a rather large bedroom, and a winding, narrow set of steep stairs which leads to an attic. It is a cozy house with enough windows to keep it bright. "Ebenezer Wormall lived here with his 3 daughters. He was a yeoman farmer and lived off what he grew in his fields. The cooking was done in the fireplace of the main room. The dining room is an old school house that Wormall bought from the town and had pegged onto the corner posts of the original house. The posts were then boxed in, columns with rectangular shafts really, to hide their rough wood. At a later date, a third section, called the 'hump' was added and although its origins are unclear, Nash thinks it was transported from a larger house in the area. This section now serves as a kitchen with a bedroom above. In the 1950's, Nash and a friend bought an old barr in Marshfield. "It cost me \$1. Of course, dismantling it cost much more," he said. He used the lumber for a downstairs bedroom, complimentary to the rustic quality of the rest of the house.

mitted a list of several houses for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and many were accepted. There are more people moving here all the time but I think they realize that this is a relatively unspoiled place. I think they appreciate what kind of a town we've got here and they want to keep it that way."

Nash's interest in Duxbury history extends beyond the Wormall house. From 1963-1966, he was president of the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society and has been a member of the executive committee for several years. "The work is more complex now," said Nash. "We have well over 100 volunteers and 10 committees who do an unbelievable amount of work. In the 1940's and 50's, the Society held its meetings in the Bigelow house on Washington St. Later we acquired the Drew House as headquarters. Mrs. Charles Ripley, granddaughter of Charles Drew, deeded the house to us for historical purposes. Gradually we outgrew it and in 1964, we put on a drive to buy the King Caesar House, which was then owned by Elizabeth Weber-Fulop. She was a Viennese artist who bought the house in 1945, and lived there until 1965, when the Historical Society purchased it. With research and the advice of experts, we began to restore the house to the way it was when Ezra Weston owned it. Certain partitions had been erected which needed to be removed and the Weston Wharf (across the street) needed substantial repair work. In its prime, the wharf was considerably longer with pilings and flooring extending into the bay. Now only the stonework of the original remains. Dr. Herman Bumpus bought the wharf, cleaned it up, planted flowers and trees, and turned it into a memorial to his father who had a life-long interest in Duxbury shipping. The house itself was in pretty good condition. An expert whom we invited to view the property remarked that he had never seen an historic house preserved in such a beautiful and unspoiled setting."

Mr. Nash gracefully bowed out of the Historical Society presidency when he felt that "a younger group of people should take over." He remains a consultant and commends the "very able group in charge now." In studying the history of Duxbury, Nash has found that discretion is a useful tool. "You have to be careful about the stories you hear. Some have been embellished and grown into fantasy with age. They become more colorful and myths do make nice stories but they are not always to be believed." King Caesar's "slave quarters" serve as a case in point. "It was said that Ezra Weston used to smuggle slaves from his ships through an underground tunnel into the servants' quarters of the house. It is highly unlikely that Weston owned slaves; they were probably indentured servants and there is no underground tunnel. Makes an interesting story though."

A genteel enthusiasm for Duxbury flows through Nash's conversation. He says things in such a way that the listener is caught in his web of truly intriguing history. "This is a unique town with many unspoiled houses of historic significance. Several years ago the Duxbury Historical Commission sub-